

CHAPTER VIII

The Edict of the Emperor Caesar Augustus is Published Commanding All Subjects of the Empire to Register, and what St. Joseph Did when He Heard It.

448. It had been decreed by the immutable will of the Most High for the Onlybegotten of the Father to be born in the town of Bethlehem (Mich. 5:2), and thus it had been foretold by the Saints and Prophets of foregone ages (Ez. 34:24); for the decrees of the absolute will of God are infallible, and since nothing can resist them (Esther 13:9), sooner would heaven and earth pass away than they fail to be accomplished (Mt. 24:35). The fulfillment of this immutable decree the Lord secured by means of an edict of Caesar Augustus for the whole Roman Empire, ordering the registration or enumeration of all the world, as St. Luke says (Lk. 2:1). The Roman Empire at that time embraced the greater part of what was then known of the earth, and therefore they called themselves masters of the world, ignoring all other nations. The object of this census was to make all the inhabitants acknowledge themselves as vassals of the Emperor and pay a certain tax to their temporal lord; for this registration everyone was to go to his native city in order to be inscribed. This edict was also proclaimed in Nazareth and came to the hearing of St. Joseph while he was on an errand. He returned to his house in sorrowful consternation and informed his heavenly Spouse of the news which had spread about concerning the edict. The most prudent Virgin answered: "Let not this edict of the temporal ruler cause thee any concern, my master and spouse, for all that happens to us occurs on account of the Lord and King of heaven and earth, and his providence shall assist and govern us in whatever happens. Let us place our confidence in Him and we shall never be confounded" (Ecclus. 32:28).*

449. Most holy Mary was capable of being entrusted with all the mysteries of her most holy Son, and She knew of the prophecies and their fulfillment, hence also that the Onlybegotten of the Father and her own was to be born in Bethlehem, a pilgrim and poor; however, She said nothing of this to St. Joseph, for without being commissioned by the Lord She would reveal none of his secrets. All that She was not commanded to reveal She concealed with admirable prudence, despite her desire of consoling her most faithful and holy spouse. She desired to entrust Herself to his direction and arrangement without acting the part of those who are wise in their own conceit, as the Wise Man warns us (Prov. 3:7). They therefore conferred with each other about the course to be pursued, for already the pregnancy of the heavenly Lady was far advanced and her parturition was approaching. St. Joseph said: "Queen of heaven and earth and my Lady, if Thou hast no order to the contrary from the Most High, it seems to me obligatory that I go to comply with this edict of the Emperor. And though it would be sufficient for the heads of families to go alone to fulfill this responsibility, I dare not leave Thee bereft of assistance in thy needs, nor could I live without thy presence, nor would I have a moment's peace absent from Thee. It is not possible for my heart to be at rest without seeing Thee. Yet if Thou goest with me to our city of Bethlehem, where we can make this profession of obedience to the Emperor, I see thy divine birth is very near, and thus for this reason, due to my great poverty, I fear placing Thee in such evident risk. If thy birth would happen on the way amid inconvenience which I could not alleviate I would be incomparably disconsolate. This concern

* cf. also Ps. 24:3 [Ed.]

afflicts me. I supplicate Thee, my Lady, to present it before the Most High and beseech Him to hear my desire of not being separated from thy company.”

450. The humble Spouse obeyed what St. Joseph requested, and though She was not ignorant of the divine will yet She would not omit this act of sheer obedience as a most humble subject. She presented to the Lord the will and desires of her most faithful spouse, and His Majesty responded: “My friend and Dove, obey my servant Joseph in what he has proposed and desires; accompany him on the journey. I shall be with Thee and assist Thee with paternal love and protection in the labors and tribulations which Thou shalt suffer for my sake, and although they shall be very great, my powerful arm shall make Thee come forth glorious from all of them. Thy footsteps shall be beautiful in my sight (Cant. 7:1). Go with him and do not fear, since this is my will.” Then the Lord in the sight of the divine Mother gave to the holy Guardian Angels a new and special command and precept to serve Her during this journey with particular care and solicitude as befitted the magnificent mysteries which would be transacted. Along with the thousand Angels who ordinarily served as her guard the Lord commanded another nine thousand to attend on their Queen and Mistress and serve as a guard of honor ten thousand strong from the first day of her journey. This they did as most faithful servants of the Lord, as I shall say later on (456-61, 470, 589, 619, 622, 631, 634, etc.). The great Queen was renewed and strengthened with new enlightenment for the troubles and tribulations which would be occasioned by the persecution of Herod and other happenings at the birth of the infant God (Mt. 2:16). For all this She offered her unconquered and prepared Heart (Ps. 107:2), and undisturbed She gave thanks to the Lord for all He would choose to do and arrange in regard to these future events.

451. She returned from this heavenly interview to St. Joseph and announced to him the will of the Most High that She accede to his desires and accompany him on his journey to Bethlehem. St. Joseph was filled with new consolation and delight. Acknowledging the great favor conferred upon him by the right hand of the Most High, he gave thanks with profound acts of humility and reverence, and addressing his heavenly Spouse he answered: “My Lady, cause of my joy, my happiness, and my good fortune, my only sorrow in this journey will now be the hardships which Thou must undergo because I have no means to relieve them and provide the comfort which I desire to furnish Thee for the pilgrimage. But we shall find relatives, acquaintances, and friends of our family in Bethlehem, whom I hope shall receive us with charity, and there Thou canst rest from the discomforts of the journey if the Most High shall dispose it as I thy servant desire.” In truth the holy spouse St. Joseph thus lovingly planned, but the Lord had already disposed all things in a way unknown to him, and therefore he experienced so much the greater bitterness and sorrow when all his loving expectations failed, as we shall see. Most holy Mary said nothing to St. Joseph of what She knew the Lord had decreed concerning the heavenly birth, though She knew well it would be different from what he expected; instead She encouraged him, saying: “My spouse and master, I go with much pleasure in thy company; let us make this journey as poor people in the name of the Most High, since His Highness shall not despise poverty, which He himself came to seek with so much love. Be assured his protection and help shall be with us in necessity and labor; let us place in Him all our confidence. Do thou, my master, place to his account all thy concerns.”

452. They at the same time resolved upon the day of their departure, and the holy spouse diligently searched in the town of Nazareth for some beast of burden to bear the Lady of the world. He could not easily find one because so many people were going to different towns in order to fulfill the requirements of the edict of the Emperor. But after much effort and laborious care St. Joseph found an unpretentious little beast which, if we can call such creatures fortunate,

was the most fortunate of all the irrational animals since it was privileged not only to bear the Queen of all creation and the blessed fruit of her womb, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, but afterwards to be present at the birth of the Child (Is. 1:3), and since it gave to its Creator the homage denied to Him by men, as I shall relate (485). They prepared what was necessary for the journey, which would last five days, the provisions of the heavenly travelers being the same as that which they had carried on their previous journey to the house of Zacharias as described above in Book Three, chapter XV, number 196, namely only bread, fruit, and some fishes, the ordinary food they ate. Since the most prudent Virgin was enlightened regarding their protracted absence She made use of prudent concealment in taking along the blankets and swaddling clothes necessary for her heavenly delivery, for She desired to dispose all things according to the exalted intentions of the Lord and in preparation for the events which She expected. In the interim until they could return they left their house in the care of the woman who normally did so on such occasions.

453. The day and hour for their departure for Bethlehem arrived, and because of the reverence with which the most faithful and fortunate Joseph had begun to treat his sovereign Spouse he diligently and carefully sought what would please and serve Her. He implored Her with great affection to make known to him all her desires and call to his attention all he might forget in regard to her pleasure, convenience and comfort, or that would please the Lord whom She bore in her womb. The humble Queen thanked him for his loving attention, and referring it all to the glory and service of her most holy Son She consoled and animated him to meet courageously the hardships of the journey, assuring him anew the Almighty was pleased with his affectionate solicitude. She also informed him of the will of His Majesty that they meet with patience and joy of heart the hardships of poverty on their way. In order to begin her journey the Empress of heaven knelt at the feet of St. Joseph and asked him for his blessing. Although the man of God shrunk from such a request and strenuously objected due to the dignity of his Spouse, She nevertheless remained victorious in her humility and prevailed upon him to give Her his benediction. St. Joseph complied with great fear and reverence, and immediately cast himself at her feet with abundant tears, asking Her to present him anew to her most holy Son and obtain for him divine pardon and grace. Thus prepared they started from Nazareth for Bethlehem in midwinter, which made the journey more painful and difficult. But the Mother of the Life,* whom She bore in her womb, attended solely to the divine activities and colloquies of the Lord, observing Him in the virginal chamber of her womb, imitating Him in his works, and giving Him more delight and honor than all the rest of creatures together.

INSTRUCTION GIVEN ME BY THE QUEEN, MOST HOLY MARY.

454. My daughter, in all thy discourse on my life, and in each of the chapters and mysteries thou art writing, thou shalt come to know the divine and admirable providence of the Most High and his fatherly love toward me, his humble servant. Although human capacity cannot worthily penetrate and ponder these admirable works of such exalted wisdom, yet mortals must venerate them with all their powers and seek to participate in the favors which the Lord showed me by striving to imitate me, for mortals must not think that only for my sake and in me God desired to show Himself as holy, powerful, and infinitely good. It is certain if any or all souls would entrust themselves to the direction and government of this Lord they would soon experience that same

* cf. Jn. 14:6 [Ed.]

fidelity, punctuality, and most sweet efficacy with which His Majesty arranged all things which touched upon his honor and service in my life. They would likewise taste those delightful and divine emotions which I felt in relying upon his most holy will, and would not fail to receive the abundance of his gifts which are enclosed as in an infinite ocean within his divinity. Just as the waters of the ocean rush forth wherever they find a suitable opening, so the graces and blessings of the Lord overflow upon rational creatures when they are well-disposed and do not hinder their course. This truth is hidden to mortals because they do not stop to ponder and consider the works of the Almighty.

455. I desire thee to study this truth, write it within thy heart, and learn from my own actions the secret workings of thy own interior in order to understand what goes on within thee, as well as practice ready obedience and subjection to others, always preferring the good counsels of others to thy own insight and judgment. Thou must carry this to such a degree that in order to obey thy superiors and thy spiritual directors thou must take no notice of what thou dost foresee shall happen contrary to their expectations, just as I did when I knew the expectation of my holy spouse Joseph would not happen on our journey to Bethlehem. And even when some equal or inferior commands thee such things, be silent and hide thy better foreknowledge; perform all that is not sin or imperfection. Listen to all with attention and silence so thou mayest learn; in speaking be very slow and reserved, for in this consists prudent and careful communication.* Always bear in mind to ask the blessing of the Lord for all thou dost desire to undertake in order not to wander from what is pleasing to Him. Whenever thou hast an opportunity ask also the permission and blessing of thy spiritual father and director in order not to fall short of the greatest merit and perfection in thy works, and also to give me the pleasure which I desire of thee.

* cf. James 1:19 [Ed.]